

The Roles and Contributions of the Inyo National Forest - DRAFT

The Inyo NF, located on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada is known for its spectacular mountain scenery and world-class recreational opportunities. The forest encompasses approximately 2 million acres that are between 3,800 and 14,495 feet in elevation. The eastern Sierra Nevada is known for its large expanses of undeveloped land. The forest includes the Mono Lake Designated National Scenic Area and almost 1 million acres of designated wilderness. The forest shares boundaries with Sequoia-Kings Canyon, Yosemite, and Death Valley National Parks, the Devils Postpile National Monument, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), private entities, and the Sequoia, Sierra, and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests. The communities within and adjacent to the forest are relatively small and discrete. Limited sprawl exists, so connectivity between the forest and similar ecosystems on adjacent lands is relatively intact with regard to development.

The eastern Sierra Nevada offers many benefits both socially and economically thus establishing a deep-rooted connection between this land and the people of the area. Indigenous human populations are known to have been in the Sierra Nevada for at least 10,000 years. Archaeological evidence shows that these populations practiced land management, including agriculture and burning, for 3,000 years or more. By the mid-1800s, Euro-Americans had settled in the Owens Valley. Native occupancy and practices continued, although on a much smaller scale and in limited areas. Mining practices in the surrounding mountains influenced the culture and changed the landscape. Though placer mining was limited on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, a large number of smaller mines resulted in the development of a transportation network that brought humans into areas not previously well traveled. Logging of pinyon pine and Jeffery pine was intensive in some areas as a fuel source for mining operations and growing urban centers. The forest's contribution to this history is important in defining the social and economic structure of the landscape.

The east half of the Inyo NF includes the Glass and White-Inyo Mountain Ranges, and falls within the Great Basin and Intermountain Desert bio-regions. These areas have a rich ecological and cultural history which differs from that of the Sierra Nevada. In particular, historic Euro-American use was more focused on livestock grazing and mineral prospecting than on timber. In the past, the presence of different fauna, including desert bighorn and pronghorn antelope, shaped the human use of this land.

Recreational uses on the Inyo NF are extremely important, both socially and economically. Over 2 million users visit the Inyo NF yearly; with the majority of visitors coming from Southern California. The forest also receives high visitor use from citizens from other countries. This is due to the opportunities the eastern Sierra Nevada provides with Death Valley National Park, Mt. Whitney, and Yosemite National Park all within a day's drive of each other. Recreational fishing and hunting, hiking, backpacking, developed campgrounds, ski resorts, opportunities for off-highway vehicle use, and breath-taking landscapes all provide for economic benefits, and provides sustainability, to local communities. This contribution occurs through visitor spending that supports jobs in local businesses and also contributes to county sales tax revenues that local governments use to provide important public services in these communities.

The changing elevation across the forest, combined with the variability in aspect and slope, the variety of geology and soils, and the amount and timing of precipitation creates an extremely high diversity of ecosystems inhabited by at least 1,300 plant species, and approximately 300 terrestrial wildlife species. The Inyo NF is also part of a large block of contiguous wilderness habitat connecting the eastern and western portions of the Sierra Nevada. The forest's terrestrial and aquatic plant and animal species and the resulting biodiversity are critical for a resilient and healthy forest ecosystem on which, all social and economic contributions are dependent.

Maintaining wildland urban interface areas in a condition that prevents the spread of fire into adjacent lands and communities is a key contribution of the plan to local communities. Fire along with mechanical treatments will be used as a tool within the national forest to reduce hazardous fuels and achieve other desired conditions. However, fire will also be suppressed actively to protect key resources within the national forest and to prevent intrusion of dangerous fires into the wildland urban interface.

At a regional level, runoff from the forest flows into Mono Basin in the north, the Upper San Joaquin River to the west, Owens River in the east, and the Upper Kern River to the south. About 93 percent of the perennial streams on the forest are free flowing and stream flows are functioning within their range of natural variability. An average of 34 percent of the runoff produced into the Owens Lake and Mono Lake watersheds are exported to the City of Los Angeles a critical component in supporting social and economic sustainability in that area. Water on the forest also is used for development of hydroelectricity that powers homes and businesses in the region.

Some of these benefits of the forest are more easily appreciated than are others. For example, forest recreational and cultural opportunities as well as a clean water supply are enjoyed directly by people and communities as a whole and as a result, their contributions to our well-being are more clearly understood. Other vital forest ecosystem services provide benefits that are less apparent in our daily lives but are important because they support and regulate the ecosystems and social environments in which we live (e.g. biodiversity). The benefits from all forest contributions provide tremendous ecological, social and economic value to us all. The term "value" is used here to represent something more inclusive than a monetary or dollar value and capture the idea that all contributions of the Inyo NF, even when they are not directly relatable to dollars that are spent or received, still contribute to improving the quality of our lives.